Penultimate draft. Please do not cite. Final version is published in Synthese:

https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11229-018-1830-8

**ANTI-INDIVIDUALISM AND TRANSPARENCY**

**Vojislav Bozickovic**

**Abstract**

Anti-individualists hold that having a thought with a certain intentional content is a relational rather than an intrinsic property of the subject. Some anti-individualists also hold that thought-content serves to explain the subject’s cognitive perspective. Since there seems to be a tension between these two views, much discussed in the philosophical literature, attempts have been made to resolve it. In an attempt to reconcile these views, and in relation to perception-based demonstrative thoughts, Stalnaker (2008) argues that an anti-individualist account of the facts that determine thought-content can be reconciled with a suitably qualified version of a principle of epistemic transparency. Acknowledging this, and in agreement with the view that thought-content should serve to explain the subject’s cognitive perspective, I argue that, his intentions notwithstanding, this view of transparency of thought-contents does not serve to explain the subject’s cognitive perspective on Stalnaker’s own terms and that the intricacies involved in his argumentation for saving his anti-individualist project are indirectly supportive of an individualist account of the subject’s cognitive perspective. In so doing, I leave intact some of his key claims that are plausible in their own right.

**Introduction**

Individualism maintains that all or most thought-contents do not depend for being the contents they are on any relations to entities beyond the body of the subject while anti-individualism maintains that there are thought-contents that depend for being the contents they are on relations to such entities. Individualism maintains that having a thought with a certain intentional content is an intrinsic property of the subject while anti-individualism maintains that having such a thought is a relational rather than an intrinsic property of the subject (see, e.g. Burge 2010, pp. 25f.). If thought-content should serve to explain the subject’s cognitive perspective it needs to be transparent to the subject. Being dependent on relations that are external to the subject’s conception of the situation anti-individualist thought-contents seem to be at odds with transparency. To establish whether this needs to be the case it is helpful to specify what it is for a thought-content to be transparent. To start with, consider Boghossian’s transparency thesis which has two parts, the “transparency of sameness” and the “transparency of difference”.

(a) If two of a thinker’s token thoughts possess the same content, then the thinker must be able to know a priori that they do; and (b) If two of a thinker’s token thoughts possess distinct contents, then the thinker must be able to know a priori that they do (Boghossian 1994, p. 36, 2011, p. 457).

Boghossian (1994, p. 36) uses “a priori” to mean “independent of outer experience” in a way that is consistent with knowledge being a priori if it is based on inner experience or introspection (see also Brown, 2004, ch. 5).1

When mental contents violate one or both of these transparency theses, we get cases in which the subject who intuitively looks fully rational, and is merely missing some empirical information, is made to look as if she is committing simple logical fallacies in her reasoning. Violations of transparency blur the distinction between errors of reasoning and errors of fact. On the face of it, anti-individualism violates (a) and (b) and should, therefore, be rejected (see Boghossian 2011, pp. 457-458).

However, in relation to perception-based demonstrative thoughts, and against Boghossian’s violation of transparency charge, Stalnaker (2008) argues that an anti-individualist account of the facts that determine thought-content can be reconciled with a suitably qualified version of a principle of epistemic transparency in a bid to meet his requirement, shared by some other anti-individualists, that thought-content serves to explain the subject’s cognitive perspective.2 Stalnaker does not defend the principles of the transparency of sameness and difference exactly as Boghossian states them, nor does he provide an alternative formulation. His aim is just to show ‘that an anti-individualist thesis about content attribution is compatible with an account of reasoning that is clear about the difference between errors of reasoning and errors of fact, as Boghossian rightly says that any adequate account must be’ (Stalnaker 2008, p. 115). For, ‘[i]f we could be wrong, on empirical grounds, about the contents of our own thoughts, then we could be wrong, on empirical grounds, about the validity of our reasoning, and this seems incompatible with the idea that we can separate the assessment of reasoning from the assessment of the truth of the premises on which the reasoning is based’ (Stalnaker: 2008, pp. 114-115).

In view of this, Stalnaker argues that cases in which the subject falsely identifies different things do not threaten a violation of the transparency of difference of thought-contents. Acknowledging this, and in agreement with the view that thought-content should serve to explain the subject’s cognitive perspective, I argue that, his intentions notwithstanding, this view of transparency of thought-contents does not serve to explain the subject’s cognitive perspective on Stalnaker’s own terms and that the intricacies involved in his argumentation for saving his anti-individualist project are indirectly supportive of an individualist account of the subject’s cognitive perspective. In so doing, I leave intact some of his key claims that are plausible in their own right.

**Transparency of Difference**

Stalnaker holds the anti-individualist view that the property of having a thought with a certain intentional content is a relational rather than an intrinsic property of the thinker (Stalnaker 2008, p. 114.)3. It is part of this view that if the relevant information of which the subject is in possession causally derives from two different objects, thought-contents (propositions) based on the causal relations with these objects will be different even though she takes this information to derive from a single object. This seems to make thought-contents (propositions) opaque to the subject. But Stalnaker does not think so. He thinks that ‘an anti-individualist account of the facts that determine content can be reconciled with a suitably qualified version of a principle of epistemic transparency’ (2008, p. 115). In accordance with this, Stalnaker claims that cases in which the subject falsely identifies different things do not threaten a violation of the transparency of difference of thought-contents (propositions) (2008, p. 126).

To show this, Stalnaker considers a case in which the subject takes two different ships that she perceives in a harbour via their respective parts for a single ship. Suppose that behind a large building, the bow of a certain ship is visible on the left, while behind the building on the right the stern of a different shorter ship blocks the view of the stern of the first ship such that the subject believes that *this* ship (looking at the bow of the first ship) is the same as *that* ship (looking at the stern of the second ship). As a result, the subject will be disposed to reason as follows:

(I) *This* ship (pointing to the bow of the first ship) is an aircraft carrier;

*This* ship (pointing to the stern of the second ship) is British;

Therefore, there is a British aircraft carrier in the harbour.

It is clear that the two premises are about different ships, so both are true, but the conclusion is false. Since the premises are about different ships, the propositions that *this* ship is an aircraft carrier and that *that* ship is in aircraft carrier are distinct by the lights of anti-individualism but the subject seemingly fails to grasp that they are different. In failing to grasp that the given inference is invalid, she will fail to grasp that that these propositions are different. We get a case in which the subject who intuitively looks fully rational, and is merely missing some empirical information, is made to look as if she is committing a simple logical fallacy in her reasoning.

However, Stalnaker thinks that while the two premises are respectively about different ships and true, and the conclusion is false, in thinking that there is only one ship in play the subject is not making an unwitting logical error. She is not confusing the proposition that *this* ship is an aircraft carrier with the distinct proposition that *that* one is. Her reasoning is best represented as involving a false tacit presupposition, a suppressed premise, that *this* ship is *that* one, rather than a false belief that the two thoughts have the same content. Stalnaker continues:

This way of representing the reasoning does not assume that [the subject] has entertained the possibility that the two ships are different – the possibility that distinguishes the two propositions – or that the proposition that excludes this possibility is in any way encoded at some perhaps subpersonal level in [the subject’s] cognitive apparatus. Most of what we presuppose is presupposed simply by not recognizing the possibilities in which the presuppositions are false. The explicit statement of the tacit presupposition is part of the theorist’s representation of the situation (Stalnaker 2008, p. 127).

Stalnaker suggests that the reason it is appropriate to credit the given subject with the presupposition in question has to do with the fact that she would have no difficulty understanding the claim that *this* ship is an aircraft carrier, while *that* one is not, and would not take the claim to be a simple contradiction.4 He thinks that it is reasonable to say that, while the subject has the correct belief that the two statements (that *this* is an aircraft carrier and that *that* one is) distinguish between the possibilities compatible with what she is presupposing in the same way, we need not say that she believes that they express the same proposition, relative to a wider range of possibilities (Stalnaker, p. 128).

Since inference (I) is valid, the subject is not confusing the proposition that *this* ship is an aircraft carrier with the distinct proposition that *that* one is although she errs as to how many ships there are. There is no threat of a violation of the transparency of difference of these propositions and the distinction between errors of reasoning and errors of fact is preserved. While the subject is confusing the two ships for one ship, she is not confusing the two propositions for one proposition. Insofar Stalnaker is right in claiming that an anti-individualist thesis about content attribution is compatible with an account of reasoning that is clear about the difference between errors of reasoning and errors of fact, that any adequate account must be (Stalnaker 2008, p. 115).

The claim that the explicit statement of the subject’s presupposition that *this* ship is *that* one is part of the theorist’s representation of the situation is itself part of Stalnaker’s view that it is us interpreters who attribute partial propositional contents to pick out contextually relevant aspects of the subject’s total state of understanding at a time. As a result, there is no single interest-independent objective propositional content of the subject’s thoughts. There is no invariant, context-independent way of characterizing her thought-contents (Stalnaker 2008, pp. 102-105; p. 131). In those cases in which the subject confuses two different objects for a single one, Stalnaker attributes partial intensions defined on the set of possibilities compatible with the subject’s empirical presuppositions about how many objects there are. These partial intensions are not exhaustive or definitive characterizations of the subject’s state of mind but interest-relative samplings of complex cognitive states. Stalnaker’s reconciliation of an anti-individualist account of the facts that determine content with transparency is rooted in a basic interpretative principle to assign anti-individualist contents in such a way as to be reflected in the subject’s own reasoning and dispositions.

This suggests that in the two-ship case that we are discussing the theorist attributes to the given subject the presupposition that *this* ship is *that* one in accordance with the subject’s empirical presupposition that there is a single ship in play, which is neither articulated in the subject’s reasoning nor subpersonally encoded. Compliance with the subject’s empirical presupposition about how many ships there are is required because we ascribe thought in order to explain action, and to assess the reasoning of thinkers, and such explanations and assessments cannot turn on facts that are inaccessible to the subject (see Stalnaker 2008, p. 114). Stalnaker continues:

Thinkers are things with a capacity to make their actions depend on the way the world is, and with dispositions to make their actions depend on the way they take the world to be. Theorists and attributors of thought characterize these capacities and dispositions by locating the world as the thinker takes it to be in a space of relevant alternative possibilities. The theorist uses actual things and properties to describe these possibilities, and that is why content depends on facts about the actual world. ... [W]hen [the thinker] conflates distinct things, or thinks of one thing as two, ... , we may find it difficult to characterize a world according to the thinker that is apt for describing that person’s cognitive capacities and dispositions. But our descriptive resources are rich and flexible, and in context, we can usually find a way. What counts as a correct description of the world according to the thinker may depend on the attributor’s context. A principle of epistemic transparency is satisfied, according to this picture, not because the thinker is directly acquainted with an inner object that has an inner content essentially, but because an apt description of a thinker’s cognitive state, if it is to explain the rational capacities and dispositions it is intended to explain, must represent the way the world is according to the thinker in a way that satisfies it (Stalnaker 2008, p. 131).

We saw that in the discussed two-ship case a principle of transparency is satisfied in that in giving an apt description of the subject’s cognitive state the theorist attributes to her the presupposition that *this* ship is *that* one which makes inference (I) valid. Hence there is no threat of a violation of the transparency of difference between the proposition that *this* ship is an aircraft carrier and the proposition that *that* ship is an aircraft carrier. But since such a description must represent the way the world is according to the subject, in view of the fact that there is incontrovertible sameness of the ship from the subject’s point of view, the theorist attributes to her this presupposition in accordance with her belief that the two statements (that *this* is an aircraft carrier and that *that* one is) distinguish between the possibilities compatible with what she is presupposing in the same way, and not because ‘we need not say that [s]he believes that they express the same proposition, relative to a wider range of possibilities’ as Stalnaker suggests (2008, p. 128).5

As a result, Stalnaker’s attempt to reconcile an anti-individualist account of the facts that determine content with transparency that is rooted in a basic interpretative principle to assign anti-individualist contents in such a way as to be reflected in the subject’s own reasoning and dispositions fails. The anti-individualist contents in question, i.e. the propositions that *this* ship is an aircraft carrier and that *that* ship is an aircraft carrier, are not reflected in the subject’s own reasoning and dispositions since they do not serve to represent the way the world is according to the subject. This is so in spite of the acknowledged fact that the subject is not confusing these two propositions thanks to the validity of (I), which way the distinction between errors of reasoning and errors of fact is preserved.

**Transparency of Sameness**

To recall, Stalnaker claims that an anti-individualist thesis about content attribution is compatible with an account of reasoning that is clear about the difference between errors of reasoning and errors of fact, that any adequate account must be. We saw that this difference is preserved in the case in which the subject confuses two different ships for a single one. The issue that I want to address now is how the difference between errors of reasoning and errors of fact is supposed to be preserved in the reverse case. Suppose the subject takes the two ship-ends that she sees on the left and the right of a large building, that in fact belong to the same ship, to belong to two different ships. As a result, she will refrain from making the following inference:

(II) *This* ship (pointing to the ship’s bow) is an aircraft carrier;

*This* ship (pointing to the ship’s stern) is British;

Therefore, there is a British aircraft carrier in the harbour.

We saw that, in conformity with anti-individualism, Stalnaker claims that if the relevant information of which the subject is in possession causally derives from two different objects, thought-contents (propositions) based on the causal relations with these objects will be different even though she takes this information to derive from a single object. In a parallel fashion, suppose that the fact that the relevant information of which the subject is in possession causally derives from the same ship makes it the case that the proposition that *this* ship is an aircraft carrier is the same as the proposition that *that* ship is an aircraft carrier, such that (II) is valid. Can the strategy that Stalnaker employs in the case of (I) work here in accounting for the error the subject is making?

In the case of (I), the subject is not making an error of reasoning in spite of making an error of fact thanks to the premise ‘*this* ship is *that* one’, which turns an invalid argument into a valid one. By contrast, adding the premise ‘*this* ship is not *that* one’ to (II) does not affect its validity. With or without this premise, (II) is valid. This leaves us with a puzzle of how to explain the fact that the subject fails to grasp its validity without committing any logical error.6 The distinction between errors of reasoning and errors of fact seems blurred. The subject who intuitively looks fully rational, and is merely missing some empirical information, is made to look as if she is committing a simple logical fallacy in her reasoning.

In reply, it can be said that this is simply an available inference which the subject **fails** to make, it is **not** an error. In aiming to avoid epistemic errors Stalnaker need not to be concerned about failures to make available inferences. He could also claim that here it is a different erroneous implicit thought which explains the “error” (again, not an error, merely a missed opportunity), namely, the tacit presupposition that *this* ship is not *that* one. By default, each of these moves could preserve the difference between errors of reasoning and errors of fact. For, in failing to make an inference the subject is not committing an error of reasoning.

However, failing to make an inference in accordance with either of these replies makes the proposed anti-individualist content irrelevant in describing the subject’s cognitive state. That this kind of content does not figure in describing the subject’s cognitive state by Stalnaker’s own lights will be shown in the next section.

**The *Enterprise* Case**

While Stalnaker does not consider an argument such as (II) he does consider the underlying case in which the subject takes the same ship as perceived via its two different parts for two different ships. He quotes Perry:

Suppose I am viewing the harbor from downtown Oakland; the bow and the stern of the aircraft carrier *Enterprise* are visible, though a large building obscures the middle. The name “*Enterprise*” is clearly visible on the bow, so when I tell the visitor “This is the *Enterprise*”, pointing toward the bow, this is readily accepted. When I say, pointing to the stern clearly several city blocks from the bow, “That is the *Enterprise*”, however, she refuses to believe me (Perry 1977, p. 9; Stalnaker 2008, pp. 81-82).

Stalnaker claims that in this kind of case the content of what is expressed or believed in a context is not detachable from the context in which it is expressed or believed (2008, pp. 81-82). This is in line with Stalnaker’s (1978) basic two-dimensional semantics which assigns truth conditions relative to pairs of worlds. Possible-worlds content can then be assigned relative to subsets of worlds when for a given subset the two-dimensional matrix restricted to that subset produces constant rows. ‘This is F’ and ‘That is F’ always produce different full two-dimensional matrices since there are worlds in which ‘this’ and ‘that’ are used targeting different objects. However, restricted to certain sets of worlds, they may produce the same possible-worlds content. So both in the case in which the subject takes two different ships for a single one and in the case in which she takes a single ship for two different ones, transparency can let the subject know that the ‘this’ and ‘that’ thoughts are different (relative to a sufficiently broad set of worlds, i.e. relative to a wider range of possibilities, as stated above). As a result of the transparent difference of the ‘this’ and ‘that’ thoughts (relative to a sufficiently broad set of worlds) the subject who takes a single ship for two different ones will refrain from reasoning in accordance with (II) which turns out invalid, which protects her from making an error of reasoning. Hence, the aforementioned problem concerning the transparency of sameness of thought-content does not arise. If, on the other hand, the subject is presupposing a restricted set of worlds (which is the effect of Stalnaker’s identity presupposition), the ‘this’ and ‘that’ thoughts will coincide in contextual content, and the subject can also transparently know this.

 However, as noted, Stalnaker also holds that it is us interpreters who attribute restricted sets of worlds, i.e. partial propositional contents to pick out contextually relevant aspects of the subject’s total state of understanding at a time (as evidenced by Stalnaker’s aforementioned claim that the explicit statement of the identity presupposition is part of the theorist’s representation of the situation). There is no single interest-independent objective propositional content of the subject’s thoughts. When the subject confuses two different objects for a single one, partial intensions attributed to her are not exhaustive or definitive characterizations of her state of mind but interest-relative samplings of complex cognitive states. For, in addition, there are also different anti-individualist contents relative to a wider range of possibilities which are for Stalnaker (as we saw, mistakenly) assigned in such a way as to be reflected in the subject’s own reasoning and dispositions. In contrast with this, in the *Enterprise* case there is no such thing as anti-individualist content(s) by Stalnaker own lights. The ‘this’ and ‘that’ thoughts do not have the same content (i.e. the proposition that *this* ship is an aircraft carrier is not the same as the proposition that *that* ship is an aircraft carrier), although the relevant information of which the subject is in possession causally derives from the same ship whether she is observing it via its bow or via its stern. Hence, contents, i.e. intensions, attributed to the subject compatible with her empirical presuppositions about how many objects there are, turn out to be exhaustive or definitive characterizations of the subject’s state of mind in the relevant sense. What by Stalnaker’s own lights turns out to be reflected in the subject’s reasoning and dispositions in the *Enterprise* case is her taking it that there are two different ships is play.

**Internal Facts**

To say that thought-contents (intensions) attributed to the subject compatible with her empirical presuppositions about how many ships there are exhaustively characterize the subject’s state of mind is to appeal to internal facts about the subject. In accounting for the *Enterprise* case Stalnaker takes internal cognitive facts to determine which intensions represent the subject’s state of mind. This is in line with his aforementioned claim that a principle of epistemic transparency is satisfied because an apt description of a thinker’s cognitive state, if it is to explain the rational capacities and dispositions it is intended to explain, must represent the way the world is according to the thinker in a way that satisfies it. In representing the world as it is according to the thinker – according to how many ships she takes there to be – the theorist needs to appeal to internal facts in order to explain the subject’s cognitive state.7

Recall that in the foregoing case in which the subject confuses two different ships for a single one, Stalnaker attributes partial intensions defined on the set of possibilities compatible with the subject’s empirical presuppositions about how many ships there are which are not exhaustive or definitive characterizations of the subject’s state of mind but interest-relative samplings of complex cognitive states. Once again Stalnaker takes internal cognitive facts to determine which intensions represent the subject’s actual cognitive state.

In addition to these partial intensions, in the two-ship case there are for Stalnaker also anti-individualist contents, i.e. contents that are different relative to a wider range of possibilities, that account for the subject’s cognitive state. But, as I have argued, these contents are not reflected in the subject’s own reasoning and dispositions since they do not serve to represent the way the world is according to the subject. So, we are left with partial intensions to account for this. As argued, the subject’s being disposed to reason along the lines of (I) is represented as involving a false tacit presupposition, a suppressed premise, that *this* ship is *that* one because of her empirical presupposition that one ship is in play.

**Concepts**

So how are we then to spell out these internal facts? If an apt description of the subject’s cognitive state must represent the way the world is according to the subject, the subject’s taking the *Enterprise* for two different ships sees her as thinking of it via two different concepts. It is because of this that in the kind of case in which the subject takes the same ship for two different ones she is not disposed to reason as follows:

(II) *This* ship (pointing to the ship’s bow) is an aircraft carrier;

*This* ship (pointing to the ship’s stern) is British;

Therefore, there is a British aircraft carrier in the harbour.

This explains why she is not making an unwitting logical error in taking an invalid argument for a valid one in spite of making an error of fact.

How about the reverse case in which the subject has confused two different ships for a single one? We can think of the subject’s cognitive state as involving a single concept which informs partial intensions defined on the set of possibilities compatible with the subject’s empirical presuppositions about how many ships there.

In relation to this kind of case, Recanati says:

[D]oes this mean that there is one [concept] with two objects of reference…? Or that there are two [concepts] and that I am mistakenly operating on the assumption that there is one? If the latter, in what sense can [concepts] be said to play the role ... of capturing the subject’s point of view? But there is a third option: there is a single [concept], ... but that [concept] rests on a false presupposition of identity, so it *fails to refer* (rather than referring to two objects simultaneously, as per the first horn of the dilemma) (Recanati 2013, p. 1851, n. 7).8

Now, recall that thanks to the false presupposition of identity the subject is, according to Stalnaker, not making an unwitting logical error in being disposed to reason as follows in the foregoing two-ship case:

 (I) *This* ship (pointing to the bow of the first ship) is an aircraft carrier;

*This* ship (pointing to the stern of the second ship) is British;

Therefore, there is a British aircraft carrier in the harbour.

The false presupposition that *this* ship is *that* one ensures that (I) is valid. The conclusion would follow if this presupposition which plays the role of a suppressed premise were true. To be sure, the fact that the given concept fails to refer does not stand in the way of the fact that the two original premises in (I) are about two distinct ships and both true, as Stalnaker claims. They are about distinct ships due to the fact that the subject is having an appropriate contextual referential relation with each of the ships in the process of producing them.

It should be noted that the concepts that inform partial intensions are not creations of the problematic Cartesian picture of the mind and hence creatures of darkness, as Stalnaker takes concepts to be (2008, p. 105). Since the subject’s realizing in the *Enterprise* case that different concepts are involved amounts to her taking the *Enterprise* for two different ships, her doing so does not commit her to having (direct) access to her own mental states. The same applies to the foregoing two-ship case. Since the subject’s realizing that a single concept is involved amounts to her taking the two ships for a single ship, her doing so does not commit her to having (direct) access to her own mental states. To paraphrase Stalnaker’s foregoing remark, the subject is not (committed to being) directly acquainted with an inner object that has an inner content essentially (Stalnaker 2008, p. 131). This way we bypass the issue of whether there is such a thing as an inner realm of a kind that Stalnaker alludes to. This also enables us to bypass the issue as to whether the subject who realizes that she is employing a single concept or two different concepts can be introspectively aware of this, as Boghossian claims, or whether the two views are compatible. (To be sure, Boghossian’s definitions of the transparency of sameness and difference are spelt out in terms of thought-contents which contains concepts as their constituents (Boghossian 2011, p. 461).)

*A fortiori*, the kind of access that the subject is having to thought-contents both in the *Enterprise* case and in the two-ship case does not involve her having meta-beliefs about them. And she is surely not having (direct) access to the facts concerning reference since in the two-ship case she does not realize that the concept fails to refer.9

Still, concepts do not depend for being the concepts they are on relations beyond the body of the subject, and are insofar in line with individualism, as evidenced by the fact that in the two-ship case the subject is employing a single concept (that fails to refer) although the relevant information of which she is in possession causally derives from two different ships. Since concepts are not part of the propositions (thought-contents) which are for Stalnaker unstructured, i.e. sets of possible worlds, this internalist feature of concepts is not transferred to propositional content. (To be sure, individualism and anti-individualism are theses about thought-content and, short of being content constituents, concepts cannot transfer this feature to contents.) But this comes at the cost that propositional contents are not reflected in the subject’s reasoning and dispositions. This comes at the cost that the intricacies involved in the argumentation for saving Stalnaker anti-individualist project are indirectly supportive of an individualist account of the subject’s cognitive perspective. This does not mean that we should abandon Stalnaker’s anti-individualism or that we should opt for structured propositions instead of unstructured ones (as Boghossian 2011 and Schroeter 2013 are inclined to do). All we need to do is recognize and acknowledge the role of concepts in representing the subject’s cognitive perspective (and in attributing to her the presupposition that *this* ship is *that* one in the relevant case) without fearing that they are creations of the problematic Cartesian picture of the mind.

**Concluding Remarks**

In relation to perception-based demonstrative thoughts, Stalnaker tries to reconcile an anti-individualist account of the facts that determine thought-content with a suitably qualified version of a principle of epistemic transparency. He convincingly argues that cases in which the subject falsely identifies different things do not threaten a violation of the transparency of difference of thought-contents. He is right in claiming that in being disposed to reason in accordance with (I) the subject is not making an unwitting logical error, whereby the distinction between errors of reasoning and errors of fact is preserved. He rightly claims that the subject’s reasoning is best represented to involve a false tacit presupposition, a suppressed premise, that *this* ship is *that* one. But in fulfilling his own requirement that we ascribe thought in order to explain action, and to assess the reasoning of thinkers, and that such explanations and assessments cannot turn on facts that are inaccessible to the subject, he relies on a broadly individualist account of the subject’s state of mind.10 This does not mean that we should abandon Stalnaker’s anti-individualism or that we should opt for structured propositions. The aim of this paper was rather to show how the subject’s cognitive perspective needs to be explained in the context of Stalnaker’s anti-individualism and in accordance with some of his key claims that are plausible in their own right.

It would take us far afield to even try to outline what implications this outcome might have for the broader debate over anti-individualism. But it is safe to say that much depends on the status of a suppressed premise in those cases in which the subject’s reasoning is best represented as involving such a premise.11

**Notes**

1. I thank an anonymous reviewer for this journal for pressing me on this point.
2. There are, of course, referentialist philosophers such as Kaplan (1989) and Perry (1977) who do not take the content believed and expressed by an utterance of a demonstrative sentence (which is for them Russellian) to be transparent but do not take it to account for the subject’s cognitive perspective. By contrast, Stalnaker and some other anti-individualists hold that this perspective should be accounted for in terms of thought-content and my discussion is based on this assumption.
3. Stalnaker here draws upon Burge’s definition of anti-individualism as espoused by Burge in various places. For a thorough discussion of anti-individualism, see Burge 2010, pp. 25f.
4. Arguably, it would not be appropriate to credit the subject with the presupposition that *this* ship is *that* one if she were to have difficulty understanding it. This presumably happens when the information that causally derives from two different objects is combined in an indecomposable way such that the subject is unable to understand the claim ‘This1 ≠ this2’ (see Evans 1982, p. 297). This is presumed not to be the case here. As to Stalnaker’s analysis of the parallel ‘water’/‘twater’ case, Boghossian (2011) argues that crediting a subject called Peter with the ‘twater is water’ presupposition is unjustified since it is unclear that Peter would understand this proposition or that he would not regard it as a contradiction. Boghossian criticizes those views that violate *content* transparency on the grounds that they allow a rational subject to believe logical contradictions and make simple logically invalid inferences. On similar grounds, he has recently charged the theory of *concepts* propounded by Sainsbury and Tye (2012), according to which concepts are individuated by their origin (Boghossian 2015; see also Sainsbury and Tye 2015 for their response to Boghossian).
5. In this context, Stalnaker briefly considers a case in which the possibility that distinguishes the two propositions is explicitly recognized in that the subject refuses to believe that *this* ship is the same as *that* one (2008, p. 128), a case in which the subject entertains the thought that *this* ship is an aircraft carrier, while *that* one is not. For Stalnaker, this should make clear that the theorist attributes to the subject the presupposition that *this* ship is *that* one relative to a wider range of possibilities. But whatever the merits of this claim, it does not affect my argument concerning the case considered above and I shall not labour the point here. I want to note, though, that there is a good reason to treat this case analogously to the foregoing case (rather than the other way around), in view of the fact that the subject refuses to believe that *this* ship is the same as *that* one because accepting this belief would not fit in with the way the world is according to her. I thank an anonymous reviewer for this journal for pressing me on this point.
6. Brown (2004, ch. 6) argues that Fregean anti-individualists such as Evans (1982) and Campbell (1987, 1994), who combine anti-individualism with Fregean sense, face the opposite problem. *Qua* Fregeans they insist that a rational subject can always grasp a priori simple instances of validity and contradiction, while *qua* anti-individualists they accept that a rational subject cannot always grasp a priori simple instances of invalidity. (Brown uses “a priori” similarly to Boghossian). Brown claims that in order to avoid this asymmetry these philosophers need to abandon anti-individualism. She also claims that (non-Fregean) anti-individualism is incompatible with the transparency of sameness of thought-content just as it is incompatible with the transparency of difference of thought-content.
7. The case of Kripke’s (1979) Pierre who is unaware that in using ‘Londres’ he is referring to the same city as in using ‘London’ and in the case of Boghossian’s (1994) Peter who is unaware that he is switched from a world in which in using ‘water’ he is referring to H2O to a world in which in using ‘water’ he is referring to XYZ, Stalnaker attempts to account without invoking concepts which he takes to be creatures of darkness (2008: 105). But Schroeter (2013) has pointed out that without some account of the principles for determining how particular propositions (contents) are assigned – which historical, relational, or internal cognitive facts are relevant to favouring one assignment over another – we do not really know what a set of possible worlds is representing about the subject’s mental states. Schroeter is concerned with standing rather than occurrent beliefs and raises different issues from those that I raise here. She thinks that the cases of Pierre and Peter should be accounted for in terms of mental files and believes that the mental file account is not hostile to Stalnaker’s externalism.
8. Recanati speaks of mental files rather than of concepts (and so does Schroeter in relation to the cases mentioned above). For the purposes of the present discussion it suffices to speak of concepts in a broad sense without being committed to any substantial theory of concepts. This way we are not exposed to objections levelled at mental file accounts such as those raised by Fine (2007, pp. 67-69, p. 72). Concepts as I take them to be are consonant with the way Fine accounts for “cognitive significance”.
9. Schroeter (2013, p. 286) claims that depicting Boghossian’s Peter as thinking of H20 and XYZ via the same mental file does not commit him to having transparent access to semantic facts about reference or co-reference which way Stalnaker’s anti-individualism is not threatened. I shall not pursue this issue here nor will I pursue the issue of whether invoking mental files is compatible with other varieties of anti-individualism such as Burge’s, in view of the fact that Burge wants to reconcile anti-individualism with a Fregean account of thought-content (see Burge 1979, 1986 and 1993). For a discussion of Burge’s and related views, see Brown 2004, ch. 5, Wikforss 2006, and Schroeter 2008. As to whether having access to thought-contents involves having meta-beliefs, see Schroeter 2007; Recanati 2012, ch. 10; Wikforss 2015.
10. I do not make any claims as to whether Stalnaker’s view of epistemic transparency is capable of meeting the requirements that it is supposed to meet in Stalnaker 1978 in relation to conversational situations. For a discussion of this and related issues, see Hawthorne and Magidor 2009 and 2011; Stalnaker 2009; Almotahari and Glick 2010.
11. A ‘water’/‘twater’ case is (in Stalnaker’s view) one such case in which a subject such as Boghossian’s Peter has been (slowly and) unknowingly switched from a world in which the substance called ‘water’ is H20 to a world in which the substance called ‘water’ is XYZ.

**References**

Almotahari, M. & Glick, E. 2010. Context, content, and epistemic transparency. *Mind*, *119*, 1067-1086.

Boghossian, P. 1994. The transparency of mental content. *Philosophical Perspectives*, *8*, 73-122.

Boghossian, P. 2011. The transparency of mental content revisited. *Philosophical Studies*, *155*, 457-465.

Boghossian, P. 2015. Further thoughts on the transparency of mental content. In Goldberg, S. C. (ed.) 2015.

Brown, J. 2004. *Anti-individualism and knowledge*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Burge, T. 1979. Individualism and the mental. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, *5*, 73-122.

Burge, T. 1986. Intellectual norms and the foundations of mind. *Journal of Philosophy*, *83*, 697-720.

Burge, T. 1993. Concepts, definitions, and meaning. *Metaphilosophy*, *24*, 309-325.

Burge, T. 2010. *Origins* *of* *objectivity*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Campbell, J. 1987. Is sense transparent? *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, *LXXXVIII*, 1987/1988, 273-292.

Campbell, J. 1994. *Past, space, and self*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Evans, G. 1982. *The varieties of reference*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Fine, K. 2007. *Semantic Relationalism*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Goldberg, S. C. (ed.). 2015. *Externalism, self-knowledge, and skepticism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hawthorne, J. & Magidor, O. 2009. Assertion, context, and epistemic accessibility. *Mind*, *118*, 377-397.

Hawthorne, J. & Magidor, O. 2011. Assertion and epistemic opacity. *Mind*, *119*, 1087-1105.

Kaplan, D. 1989. Demonstratives. J. Almog, J. Perry, H. Wettstein (eds.), *Themes from Kaplan*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Kripke, S. 1979. A puzzle about belief. In *Meaning and use*, A. Margalit (ed.). Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 239-283.

Perry, J. 1977. Frege on demonstratives. *Philosophical Review*, *86*, 474-497.

Recanati, F. 2012. *Mental Files*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Recanati, F. 2013. Perceptual concepts: in defence of the indexical model. *Synthese*, *190*, 1841-1855.

Sainsbury, M. & Tye, M. 2012. *Seven puzzles of thought and how to solve them*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sainsbury, M. & Tye, M. 2015. Counting concepts: response to Paul Boghossian. In Goldberg, S. C. (ed.) 2015.

Schroeter, L. 2007. The illusion of transparency. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *85*, 597-618.

Schroeter, L. 2008. Why be an anti-individualist? *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *77*, 105-141.

Schroeter, L. 2013. Are concepts creatures of darkness? *Analytic Philosophy*, *54*, 277-292.

Stalnaker, R. 1978. Assertion. In his *Context and content*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 78-95. Originally published in *Syntax and Semantics*, *9* (1978).

Stalnaker, R. 2008. *Our knowledge of the internal world*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stalnaker, R. 2009. On Hawthorne and Magidor On Assertion, context, and epistemic accessibility. *Mind*, *118*, 400-409.

Wikforss, A. 2006. Content externalism and Fregean sense. P. Marvan (Ed.), *What determines content? The internalism/externalism dispute*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press.

Wikforss, A. 2015. The insignificance of transparency. In Goldberg, S. C. (ed.) 2015.